

Looking back at 2009 and forward to 2010

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

This issue ends the year 2009 at the Gazette, and next week we'll kick off a new year and a new decade. And as with every New Year, we look forward with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

The year 2009 was a difficult year for the country. We fell into a recession, probably more severe on the coasts than locally, however the effects were also felt here. We haven't experienced the brunt of the job loss as in larger areas, but there has been some loss locally, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

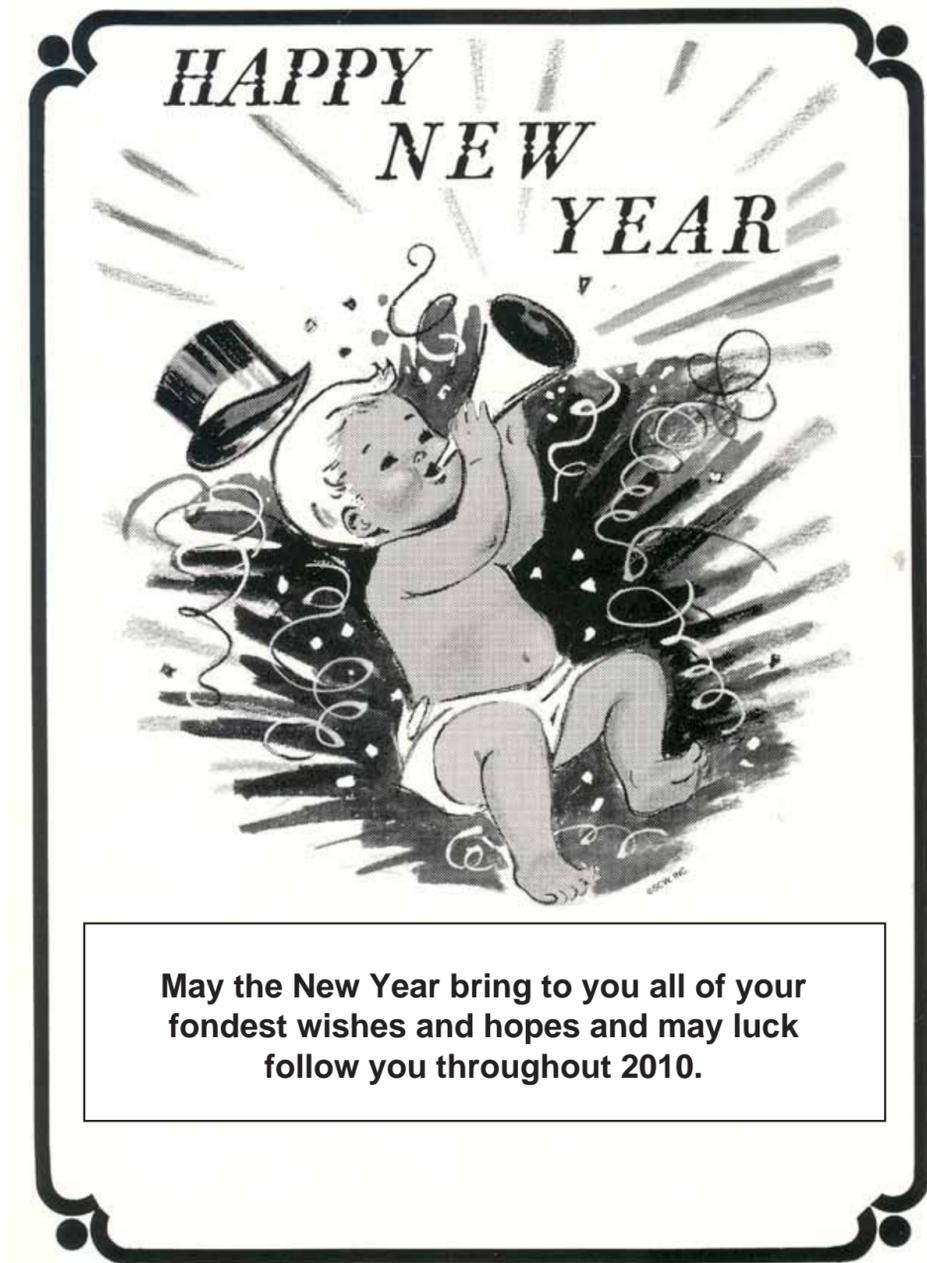
Although we don't have the home foreclosure problem that a good deal of the country has experienced, we appear to be feeling a slowdown in home sales. I haven't made any scientific study of this, but just driving around does show a number of for sale signs. I am convinced that we missed the foreclosure explosion because of the prudent lending practices of area banks. As one banker told me, "We don't do anything real fancy here, we just make home loans like we always have. We try to figure out if the customer can repay the loan before we make it."

Local residents seem to be exercising a sense of cautiousness in spending. Nothing really extreme, but I have visited with a number of people who said that they aren't buying something unless they really need it. This is always a good move to make, and does help weather economic storms.

Many people's investments and retirement funds have made some recovery by year-end. Values dropped significantly in the first few months of the year, but recent gains in stocks and bond prices have helped pull values up. I doubt anyone's portfolio is back to where it was when the year started, but certainly everyone's is higher than it was at mid-year.

Agriculture had an up and down year. Grain prices did not close the year at the highs that they were in 2008. We did receive a considerable amount of rain during the growing season, but this was a curse along with a blessing. The excessive rain caused some loss of nitrogen during the summer, particularly on light ground, which decreased yields. However, yields on heavier ground were very good. A good deal of expense had to be incurred to dry the crop this fall, as the crop did not experience very good drying days in the field. On a positive note, land prices appear to remain steady. We are not seeing the increased values we did in past years, but I have not heard of any extreme declines either.

It was a difficult year for most government agencies. Budget problems at the federal and state levels



have a way of filtering down to local government. The school is looking at state cuts, and are implementing processes to deal with these cuts. However, on the positive side our school entered this situation with a strong financial condition, and appears to be set to weather the storm. As with the school, the city government also is in a very strong financial situation, and is moving forward with a number of projects. Two major projects will be the moving of the city's water treatment center to higher ground, and the building of a levee to prevent future flooding. Work continues to progress on both projects.

2009 saw the remainder of our flood damaged business area return, even better than before. As of this writing, no final decisions have been made on the bowling alley building, the Subway restaurant or the motel, but the remaining businesses are all up and going. The stockholders of Colonial Manor voted to construct an

assisted living facility on the north side of the Manor. Work began in the fall and is hoped to be completed in the summer. This will be the first assisted living facility in Louisa County. Main Street continues to have a vibrant business district. We have a few empty buildings, but not many. There continues to be a number of people on the street at almost any time of the day.

Local non-profit clubs and organizations are doing well. The United Fund had a commendable year, as did the Community Foundation. The Lions Club continues to be a vibrant force in our community, and has been able to reinstitute their twice a year pancake breakfast during the two biker weekends. The Women's Fitness Center, which was organized to return the fitness center after the flood, is going strong in Columbus City. The Heritage Museum continues to receive items, and serves an increasing number of visitors.

A good deal of activity happened in Columbus City this year. A long-time business, Plank Implement, sold to Bennett Equipment. A major remodeling of the business building was completed during the year. Dr. Willie Wever built a new dental clinic in the location of the former Columbus City Post Office. Groundwork began on the new Community Health Center on the east side of Columbus City, and it is expected to be completed next summer.

And as every year, we sadly listed a number of our friends on page 5. They will all be deeply missed.

Although 2009 experienced its ups and downs, I feel it ended on a high, and has us well prepared to tackle 2010. A lot of good things are happening in our area, and if we look forward with a sense of optimism and progressiveness, 2010 is set to be a great year in the Columbus Community. From all of us at the Gazette, have a Great New Year.

Louisa Interpretative Center soon to be a reality at Langwood

An exciting project has been underway for several years in Louisa County and in 2010 local residents will begin to see the results. The Louisa Interpretative Center at Langwood will break ground during the upcoming year, moving one step closer to completing the vision of an environmental education and visitor center for area.

When completed, the Louisa Interpretative Center will have a building and grounds with exhibits to tell the story about natural and cultural resources in the county. Indoor displays will lead visitors outdoors and eventually on to explore thousands of acres of public lands in the surrounding area.

A \$576,000 federal grant is funding site development of the Louisa Interpretative Center at Langwood and purchase of the 40-acre tract adjacent to Langwood Education Center. The \$720,000 project requires a \$144,000 local match, which is being raised by Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation from donations both

large and small.

One unique aspect of this project is that it will be used for recreation and education long before the building goes up. The building will be integrated into the site, copying the mounded earthen shapes found at Toolesboro. These landforms will also be used to create outdoor displays and learning opportunities. Work in 2010-2011 includes initial grading to create the mounds, as well as some landscape development. When this phase is completed there will be a reconstructed prairie and a small wetland. These will be wonderful additions to the forest and pond habitats already being used for environmental education at Langwood.

This phase also includes development of the conceptual design for the building using "green building" principals, specifically achieving Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. Having a sustainable design will mean lower operating costs once the building is completed.

The land to be purchased has been held for the project first by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and now by Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation through a loan from Columbus Junction State Bank. The grant will allow Louisa County Conservation to own and begin developing the ground. Other site development in this phase will include soil surveys and an archeological study.

The Louisa Interpretative Center will serve as a focal point for more than 16,000 acres of public land that makes up the Louisa Resource Area. The center will tell the stories of LAND - PLACE - HOME, Life along the Mississippi. Maps and interactive exhibits will illustrate the unique and important LAND formations from the confluence of the Iowa and Cedar Rivers to the Mississippi. Additional displays will further illustrate PLACE such as Big Sand Mound, Flaming Prairie Park and Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge. Finally, the center will describe how the area has been HOME to people from the

builders of the Toolesboro Indian Mounds to those who live here today.

The stories of LAND - PLACE - HOME, Life along the Mississippi are important and of interest not only to long-time Louisa County natives, but to the nation and even the world. The center is expected to be a destination for the thousands of travelers on the Great River Road which runs from Minnesota to Louisiana.

Additional information about the Louisa Interpretative Center at Langwood can be found at www.tririvers.org. Groups, families or individuals can also schedule a presentation to learn more about the project. Contact Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation at 319-527-4530 or Louisa County Conservation Board at 319-523-8381.

Though work will begin soon, contributions are still needed and can be sent to Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation, PO Box 123, Wapello, Iowa 52653.

Briefly -

Local banks set New Year's hours

Columbus Junction State Bank and Community Bank have announced the following New Year's Holiday hours: the bank lobby and drive-up will be open until 3:00 p.m. on December 31st, will be closed on January 1st, and will be open until noon on Saturday, January 2nd.

City Council meets tonight

The City of Columbus Junction will hold a regular Council meeting today, Wednesday, December 30, 2009, at 5:30 p.m., in the New Civic Center/ City Hall.

Blood checks at Senior Center

Colonial Manor will be doing blood sugar and blood pressure checks at the Columbus Senior Center January 6th, 2010, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Embroidery Club to meet

The embroidery club meeting for the month of January will be meeting on January 6th at 1:00 pm at OUR SHOP, 106 Main Street, Columbus Junction, and January 11th at 6:30 pm. Both groups are still working on Hardanger Projects. Any one is welcome to attend. Please call Carol at 319-728-5648 for more information.

Grandview/Letts Lions to host soup supper

The Grandview/Letts Lions Club will hold their annual all-you-can-eat Soup Supper on Saturday, January 16, 2010, from 5-7 p.m. at the L-M Elementary School cafeteria. The menu includes chili and Wisconsin cheese soups, homemade pies, crackers, celery, carrots, pickles, and beverages. Tickets can be bought ahead of time for \$5.00 from any Grandview/Letts Lions Club member. Tickets will be \$6.00 at the door. Ages 6-12 cost \$3.00. Ages 5 and under are free.

Historical Society New Year's hours and upcoming programs

WAPELLO - The Louisa County Heritage Center will be closed through Jan. 1, 2010. The Louisa County Historical Society's first program of the new-year will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 10, 2010, at the Louisa County Heritage Center, 609 N. James L. Hodges Ave., Wapello. The Society has invited several hobbyists to display their collections and to share stories about them. Refreshments will be served. As always, admission is free.

School Board to meet in special session

The Columbus School Board will meet in special session for the purpose of beginning a book study of the book, "Leadership for Student Learning". The board currently has the book and has decided to pre-read and be prepared to discuss Chapters 1-3. The meeting place will occur at the White House, rather than at Roundy Elementary.

Here are the details of the meeting: Date: January 4, 2010. Time: 6:30 PM. Place: White House - Columbus District Administrative Office Agenda.

1. Book Study of Chapters 1-3 of book listed above.
2. Set future board meeting dates of book study.
3. Set future board meeting for Race to the Top federal program.

WCCEC New Year's hours

The Washington County Conservation Education Center at Marr Park will be closed January 1 for the holiday.

Legion to hold fish and chicken fry

The American Legion will be hosting a fish and chicken fry on Saturday, January 9th at the Legion Building. Serving will be from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. The price is \$8.00

Christmas Eve Dinner held at Senior Center



A wonderful Christmas Eve dinner was held last Thursday Noon at the Senior Center. The dinner was the brainchild of Polly Prior. She started on Thursday morning calling people and inviting them to the dinner, and encouraging them to invite others. Polly also arranged the meal. About thirty-five people attended the dinner and enjoyed a meal of ham with all of the fixings.

The Senior Center is a great facility for our community, and everyone is encouraged to use it. The Center can be rented for family dinners, anniversaries, receptions, etc. A full kitchen is available for your use, with plenty of parking also available.